

Transportation Management

If You Build It They Will Come (and other tales of how free-fare transit saved \$37 million at Cornell)



Summary: Faced in the early nineties with the need for 2,500 additional parking spaces, Cornell University decided instead to work with city and county authorities to consolidate and “build” the area transit system to attract new riders. Riders were offered fare-free transit within the county and discounted fees outside the county. Bus routes were added. Support services addressed emergencies. Faculty and staff participating in rideshare programs were provided discounts and reserved parking, while parking fees were raised. The riders came. Traffic and parking on campus, set amid waterfalls, gorges, lakes, and rolling hills in the Finger Lakes region of central New York State, was less congested. And one last item... According to the Cornell’s estimates, the University and its commuters have saved nearly \$37 million over the course of 12 years in avoided construction, infrastructure improvement and transportation costs.

Campus Profile

Cornell University
Ithaca, NY
UG Students: 13,678
Grad Students: 5,884
Faculty & Staff: 9,400
Colleges/Schools:
7 undergraduate
4 graduate/professional
Campus Operating Budget:
\$1.2 Billion
of Buildings: 260+
Size of Campus: 745 acres

Initial Project Goals (1991)

- Avoid construction of parking garage(s)
- Reduce demands on transportation infrastructure
- Institute a Transportation Demand Management Program (TDMP). The TDMP at Cornell is a benefits package comprising of a series of programs and support services targeted at reducing the number of single occupancy vehicles brought to campus by commuters.

Ongoing Project Goals (2002 – present)

- Maintain a walkable campus
- Attend to replacement of lost parking (due to campus building projects)
- Sustain aggressive demand management program

Description (in 1991)

- Needed 2,500 additional parking spaces in early 1990’s
- Concerned about the cost to construct a 1,200 vehicle parking garage
- Lost greenspace if additional parking is constructed on campus

Green Activities

The Cornell Transportation Demand Management Program has won numerous awards since it began in the early nineties, including EPA’s “Way to Go” award in 1996 for “Innovative Uses of Market Incentives.” The TDMP philosophy is part of a broader University commitment to minimize environmental impacts associated with its activities and operations.

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Pre-Project Considerations

- Ensure that transportation demand issues are fully assessed as part of the master planning process
- Understand faculty and staff commuting behaviors.
- Assess strengths and weaknesses of existing transportation system and services, including incentives and disincentives for single occupancy commuting behaviors.
- Evaluate opportunities to integrate or streamline campus, city and county transportation systems

Steps Taken

1. Incorporated Transportation Demand Management Program approaches into the master planning process.
2. Focused program incentives and marketing on faculty and staff because they create the heaviest demands.
3. Developed a suite of options – incentives and disincentives – to minimize single occupancy vehicles on campus.
4. Reconfigured the parking system into a tiered system and instituted new fees based on proximity to campus. Converted 1300 no-fee perimeter spaces to fee spaces. Increased fees for central campus parking.
5. Provided fare-free transit to faculty and staff in the county and partially subsidized fees outside of the county. This facilitated the expansion of the transit system.
6. Worked closely with municipalities to integrate multiple transit systems (Ithaca, Cornell, Tompkins County) and set up a single system called Tompkins Consolidated Area Transit (TCAT) with equal representation of the three entities on the board. One System. One Look. One numbering System. One transit map.
7. Increased penalties for parking violations.
8. Expanded some program aspects to students.
9. Sustained the program through marketing, advertising, and offering of support services. Focused on broadening the services to the needs of graduate students.

Program Description

OmniRide is the name of Cornell's partially or fully subsidized transit incentive program for faculty and staff. It operates as follows:



- Faculty or staff member decline or “turn in” a parking permit.
- There is no fee to sign up for OmniRide. The pass is a sticker on a Cornell identification card.
- Participants may ride for free anytime.
- There is unlimited free travel inside Tompkins County. Cornell pays the fare.
- Five different out of county transit systems participate. Faculty and staff pay a reduced fare through OmniRide (Cornell subsidy).
- OmniRiders receive up to 30 one-day perimeter parking permits annually for those situations when they need to bring a vehicle to campus.
- Park and ride lots are available for OmniRiders.
- The University operates the OmniRide program. The in-county bus system is managed by TCAT.

RideShare provides incentives for carpooling with other Cornell employees with a fee and rebate system.



- RideShare participants receive parking discounts and rebates. The financial incentive increases depending on the size of the group and the parking location. The larger the group and the greater the lot's distance from central campus, the greater the rebate.

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- RideShare groups that qualify for a rebate receive reserved parking.
- RideShare participants receive 10 free one-day parking permits every 6 months in case they occasionally need to bring a vehicle to campus.
- Park and ride lots are available for carpoolers.

The parking lots work on a six-tiered zone system.

- Faculty, staff or students may purchase a parking permit to park in lots on campus.
- Permit options vary based on your affiliation and your willingness to pay.
- Parking fees increase near campus (Up to \$620/year). The lot farthest from main campus is free.
- Each zone has short-term visitor parking.
- The system is flexible; faculty and staff can park in any tier lower than the zone for which they are permitted.

Other options/services are also available.

- Emergency rides are provided by Cornell for people carpooling or using public transit (operates 7:30 – 5 M – F)
- Special requests are addressed and additional free books are available for faculty and staff with confirmed family care needs that necessitate the use of a single occupancy vehicle.
- Complimentary one-day perimeter parking permits are available for faculty and staff participating in the “Occasional Parker” program which covers employees who typically walk, bike or get dropped off.

Participants

The “Commuter and Parking Services” group is a unit of the Cornell Transportation and Mail Services which is a unit of Campus and Business Services. The name has evolved over time to reflect the department’s priorities. Since the early nineties, the unit’s name has changed from the “Traffic Bureau” to “Parking Services” to the “Parking and Commuter Services” to “Commuter and Parking Services.”

Cornell works closely with the City of Ithaca and Tompkins County officials.

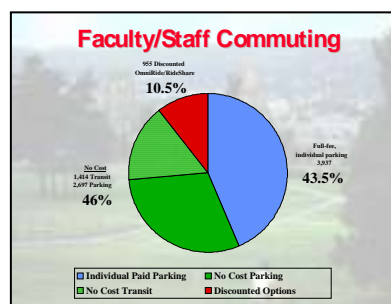
Performance and Benefits

Cost

- OmniRide is a partially or fully subsidized program. Cornell pays bulk discounted fares to TCAT. Last year, Cornell paid for 1.7 of the 2.6 million total rides provided by TCAT.
- Employee programs are funded in part through the employer benefit pool. There is no comparable fund for students.
- Parking permit revenues make up 48% of the Commuter and Parking Services operating budget. Annual parking revenues are approximately \$3.8 million.
- The total cost to operate the TDMP (e.g., transit fares, rebates), excluding salaries is \$630,000.

Performance

- The TDMP has saved nearly \$36 million over the last ten years in avoided costs.
- As the chart on the right illustrates, 46% of faculty and staff pay no commuting cost because they use OmniRide or RideShare.



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- Each year since 1991, Cornell commuters have traveled at least 10,000,000 fewer miles.
 - This saves at least 417,000 gallons of fuel annually.
 - This reduces net annual emissions by the following:
 - Carbon dioxide by 6,700,000 pounds
 - Carbon monoxide by 651,000 pounds
 - Oxides of nitrogen by 34,000 pounds
 - Hydrocarbons by 59,000 pounds
 - Particulate emissions by 732 pounds
- 517 campus bus passes were issued to students in 1992.
- More than 5,500 OmniRide passes were issued to students in 2002.

Lessons Learned

1. It's all about cost – from the perspective of faculty and staff. Focus on saving people money and ensuring their convenience. The “environmental” aspect of commuting makes riders feel good about the choice they made.
2. The University, however, should not consider the program a cost. It is part of a commuter and parking program, which is a necessary and important component of running a university.
3. Raise parking fees incrementally each year. It's better to set expectations for an incremental fee increase than to fight parking fee battles every 3-5 years.
4. Serve the community by serving the individual. The program must focus on meeting, and marketing to, the individual commuter. For example, information on the web page is organized for faculty and staff, students and visitors. It clearly emphasizes options other than parking, such as the RideShare and OmniRide program and the available support services.
5. If you build it, they will come. More buses + more service = More demand. Studies also suggest the same principle applies to the building of parking garages. If you build a garage, more people will drive and parking demand will increase.
6. You may still have to build a garage. After twelve years of avoided cost, Cornell is likely to build a 400-vehicle garage. (The \$37 million cost savings over the last 12 years and the no net increase in parking spaces compared to baseline help mitigate any angst about finally building a parking garage.)
7. Ensure that each area of campus has short-term parking for visitors.

Further Information and Resources

David Lieb, Communications and Marketing Manager, Transportation and Mail Services at 607-255-5592 or djl5@cornell.edu
<http://www.parking.cornell.edu>
<http://www.tcatbus.com>

Other Transportation Programs or Resources

Unlimited Access Programs (<http://www.washington.edu/upass/>) More than fifty colleges and universities currently have an Unlimited Access (also called Upass) program that provides fare-free transit service to more than 825,000 students and staff.

University of Colorado Boulder – <http://www.colorado.edu/sacs/ralphie/b/Buses.html>
University of Vermont <http://www.uvm.edu/~tpswww/newindex.html>
University of Massachusetts Amherst <http://www.housing.umass.edu/living/transportation.html>
Stanford <http://bontemps.stanford.edu/transportation/>

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Victoria Transport Policy Institute at www.vtpi.org includes the online TDM Encyclopedia, a comprehensive source of information about innovative management solutions to transportation problems, strategies, options and tools. This site is a great resource for strategic, lessons learned and “how to” information.

Alternative Fuel Bus System. University of Michigan
http://www.parking.umich.edu/transport/Environmental_Initiatives.html

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